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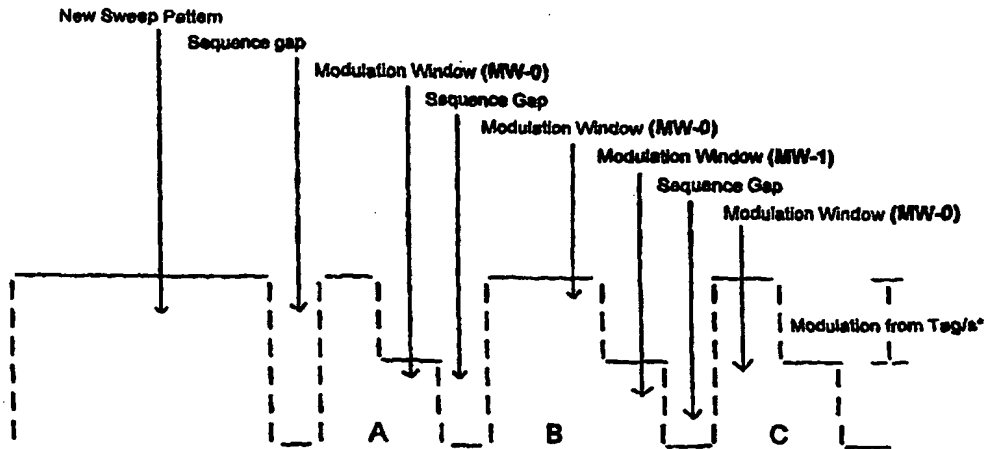
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(54) Title: ANTI-COLLISION TAG APPARATUS AND SYSTEM



*Note. The amount of modulation from tags is exaggerated. Typical modulation may be too small to be shown.

(57) Abstract

This invention relates to radio frequency identification (RFID) apparatus comprising a reader/writer and transponders (tags) such that 2 or more transponders are capable of operating simultaneously in the same field so that information in the form of data bits may be received from or sent to the tags without corruption.

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ANTI-COLLISION TAG APPARATUS AND SYSTEM

The present invention relates to radio frequency identification (RFID) apparatus comprising
5 a reader/writer (later referred to as a 'reader') and transponders (tags).

Such apparatus forms the basis of a radio frequency tagging system, where the number of
tags within the field that may be read is limited only by the number of unique combinations
of bits used to define a code to identify each tag. Alternatively, two or more tags may define
10 a set with the same combination or part combination of bits and these may be selected
simultaneously. Such may be the case when deliberately sending data to tags of the same
combination or part combination for the purposes of writing to them or disabling them or
otherwise addressing them to modify their functionality.

15 In operation, an RFID reader will attempt to communicate with one or more RFID tags
within the reader's transmission area. The reader transmits a predetermined signal (hereafter
referred to as a "field") and then monitors the signal. The tags responding to the signal
modulate it in a predetermined manner which is identified by the reader. However, if there
are a number of tags within the transmission area it is difficult and time consuming to
20 identify individual tags, communicate with only one tag and even to decrypt their responses
to the transmitted signal.

Previous systems have mostly tried to achieve anti-collision of the signals modulated by the
tags by incorporating some means to 'talk' to single tags, for example, by binary selection,
25 sometimes by using randomness and helped by the slightly differing times that the tags are
introduced into the area, or by beaming (directional control) of the field or by modification

of the field or alternatively by use of complicated algorithms to decrypt overlay data.

These systems are typically hindered by more than one tag 'talking' at the same time.

5 In the past systems have attempted to decrypt overlaying data caused by multiple tags 'talking' at the same time or have relied on random transmissions to separate signals in the time domain or have used a field beam or conduct a time consuming binary search to isolate individual tags. Often tags need to be read twice or even 3 times to confirm there has been no data error.

10

According to an aspect of the invention, there is provided a radio frequency tag apparatus comprising a plurality of tags and a transceiver for sending information to and receiving information from the tags, wherein each tag is allocated an identification word comprising a predetermined number of bits, the tags comprising means for selectively modulating a
15 signal received from the transceiver, and the transceiver comprising means for sending an interrogation signal comprising a plurality of portions, wherein each portion is associated with a predetermined bit, or bit sequence, of the identification words and is used to interrogate, substantially at the same time, the tags to identify, in response to modulated signals provided by the tags, the presence of a tag or tags having a given value at the
20 predetermined bit or bit sequence.

According to another aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of detecting the presence of tags within a target area by sending interrogation signals from a transceiver for selective modulation by tags present in the target area, each tag being allocated an

identification word comprising a predetermined number of bits, the method comprising:
sending from a transceiver an interrogation signal comprising a plurality of portions, each
portion being associated with a predetermined bit or bit sequence of the identification words
and being capable of conveying a given value for the bit or sequence of bits, wherein tags
5 having the value at the predetermined bit or bit sequence are configured to modulate the
signal, the modulation being used to identify the presence of those tags.

According to a further aspect of the present invention, there is provided a radio frequency
tag identification system comprising a receiver/transmitter and transponders which are
10 adapted to start communication at the same time and to be simultaneously interrogated and
progressively eliminated from interrogation.

The present invention is directed to an alternative way of interactively isolating tags in a way
that is highly efficient and very fast.

15

Operation is such that two or more transponders are capable of operating simultaneously in
the same field in such a manner that information in the form of data bits may be received or
sent to the tags without corruption. This has come to be known as anti-collision.

20 In contrast to previous systems, the present invention will not work unless the tags are
allowed to 'talk' at the same time and uses positively 'collision' rather than trying to avoid
it.

Moreover, the system of the present invention described is self-checking. Not only does the

reader check the tag output but the tag also checks the reader output, and will drop out in the case of an error. This self check means the tag need only be read once and is secure.

The invention will now be described by way of example only, with reference to
5 accompanying figures:

Figure 1 is a data bit stream for use in an apparatus in accordance with the invention;

Figure 2 is another data bit stream for use in an apparatus in accordance with the invention;

Figure 3 is another data bit stream for use in an apparatus in accordance with the invention;

10 Figure 4 is a block diagram of an RFID 'reader' for use in an apparatus in accordance with the invention; and

Figure 5 is a block diagram of an RFID 'tag' for use in an apparatus in accordance with the invention.

15 In an embodiment of the invention all active tags are requested to start communicating at the same time, forming a 'collision' and are simultaneously interrogated and progressively eliminated. Communications from the tags are synchronised by, in this case, a search pattern, but this may be by any other form of synchronisation. Tags that do not receive a valid search pattern do not send data at all.

20

The invention might be better thought of as Synchronised Collision. It is normal for a reader to communicate to the tag using 100% modulation of the field. To start a search pattern, the reader transmits a data pattern called a 'Start Search Pattern'. This is understood by all tags as a start search command. There is another pattern known as a 'New Sweep Pattern' which

signals a new sweep within the overall search. Each sweep represents a single interrogation of the tags within reach and a number of sweeps equal to the number of tags plus one are needed to identify the presence of each individual tag. A search will generally consist of as many sweeps as there are tags in the field and an additional final sweep that may be aborted when no tags respond. The above "start search" and "new sweep" patterns in this example are detected by their duration but may be any compatible distinguishable pattern.

Tags are only allowed to participate in a search if they have received a 'Start Search Pattern'. This among other things, prevents late arrivals from disrupting the search. After the valid reception of a start search pattern, the tag is said to go active. The reader next transmits the interrogation pulse sequence. In this embodiment, the length of the pulse determines the binary value of the interrogation pulse, but alternative encoding schemes such as pulse code modulation may be used. The tag employs amplitude modulation, however, alternative methods such as phase shift keying may be used.

A 'search' will consist of a number of 'sweeps'. Each sweep will select an individual tag or set of tags sharing the same address. A normal sequence of a search of tags of different addresses will be shown below. Three states are referred to. These are 'Active' in which case the tag will participate in the search. 'Quiescent' in which case the tag is waiting for another sweep, and 'Inactive' in which case the tag has either not received a 'Start New Search' pattern or has already participated in a search and been eliminated (written to and/or read).

The sequence of steps for identifying tags in a field is as follows;

(a) A 'Start Search Pattern' is transmitted by the reader to alert all tags in the field that a search is to follow:- all tags in range go 'active'.

(b) A sequence of interrogation pulses (portions) corresponding to the number of bits, or sequences of bits, of the tag identification word, or else a reduced number if a set is to be identified, is sent out by the reader to which active tags interactively respond and all but 1 tag (or a set of tags sharing an identical address) is eventually eliminated. Data may be written to any tag/tags selected. Any tag so selected will then go inactive until the next 'Start Search Pattern'. Tags failing to be selected on a bit by bit (or bit pattern by bit pattern) basis go quiescent the moment they fail such an interrogation.

(c) A 'New Sweep Pattern' is transmitted by the reader - all tags in the quiescent state go active again. Tags that have not received a 'Start Search Pattern' or have already been selected (read) remain inactive.

(d) The reader loops back to 'b' above. At $n + 1$ loops the reader detects no further tag interaction and ends the current search.

After transmission of a 'Start Search Pattern' the reader sends out a pulse. As the pulse duration increases, it passes through a period in time named the 0 modulation window (MW-0) in which all active tags which have a 0 in the first bit position must reply by turning on their modulator thus modulating the field. In the absence of a detectable response the reader will continue the duration of the pulse. As the pulse duration increases it passes through another period named the 1 modulation window (MW-1) in which all active tags which have a 1 in the first bit position must reply by turning on their modulator thus modulating the field. (Later it will be explained how bit patterns (such as 00,01,10,11) can be substituted for the individual bits.)

An example of a start search pattern followed by the transmission of three MW-0 windows, as transmitted by a reader, is shown in Figure 1.

5 In this embodiment, a tag will always be asked if its next bit is a 0 before it is asked if its next bit is a 1. Where more than one tag replies by modulating the field at the same time, the modulation of the field is increased. Logic within the reader will normally, upon the detection of modulation appearing in a MW-0 window, not extend the pulse to transmit a MW-1 modulation window. Where the MW-1 modulation window is not transmitted, any active tag that has a 1 in that position is programmed to go quiescent until a 'New Sweep
10 Pattern' is received. In the instance that no active tag has a '0' in this position, the reader will extend the pulse up to the '1' position and all the active tags with a '1' in this position will remain active. The gap between the reader pulses is used by the tag to sequence the progress through the bits. The reader transmits the next interrogation pulse and so on. In this way the reader can conduct a highly efficient binary elimination, such that it needs only
15 a 'Start Search Pattern' or a 'New Search Pattern' followed by as many pulses as there are bits in the tag type.

In this embodiment no distinction is made between tag data and the tag address. Tag data, if present, may be placed at the end of a tag address or alternatively in addressable blocks.
20 Once a single tag has been isolated, the same process could be repeated to read any tag data, if present, however once the possibility of collisions has been eliminated, tag data can then be read in a more conventional way such as Manchester encoding or Phase shift modulation. The key point in this invention is the self checking 'anti-collision' method of isolating a single tag (or set of tags of the same address or part address) by the method described.

A tag may receive a start search pattern or a new sweep pattern and participate yet be out of the read range of the reader. In this instance the tag itself detects an apparent inconsistency in the reader transmissions. For example a tag which has just modulated a 0 window will expect the pulse to terminate instead of going on to the 1 modulation window.

5 In this case the tag will go quiescent and wait for a new sweep pattern. This is a self-check and is a system advantage.

When a single tag or set of tags has been successfully isolated and identified, the reader may also write data to it (assuming the tag has EEROM or EPROM). Once read, the tag may be
10 pre-programmed to remain silent until either the field is removed or it receives a new 'Start Search Pattern'. The reader will usually next transmit a 'New Sweep Pattern' and continue reading and eliminating tags until none remain. The 'New Sweep Pattern' wakes any tag in the 'quiescent state' that has been eliminated, but not read, from a previous sweep, allowing it to participate in the next sweep. Each sweep will normally identify a unique tag hence
15 there will usually be as many sweeps as there are tags in the field, and a last sweep that will produce no results and may be aborted early.

The reader begins by sending a search pattern. The reader next starts to transmit a pulse. If no tag modulates the 0 window of the pulse, the reader will deduce that there is no active
20 tag in the field that has a 0 in the first bit position. In this case the reader would continue the pulse to include a 1 modulation window. Any tag in the field with a 1 in this position will start modulating in this window and will continue to be active. In the instance of the first bit, if neither window is modulated the reader will deduce that there is no tag in range.

Assuming the first bit is modulated in the 0 modulation window (MW-0) and the reader stopped the pulse before the 1 modulation window, any tag with a 1 in this position will go quiescent until either a 'New Sweep Pattern' or a 'Start Search Pattern' is received. The reader continues onto the second bit and so on until it gets to the last bit position and an individual tag (or set of tags) has been isolated. After a tag has been identified and eliminated
5 the reader will start a new sweep. (The significance of mentioning a 'set of tags' lay in the possibility that a special set of tags can be switched off, or if the facility allows, be written to, or otherwise made to perform in a special way. A further type of reader modulation may be inserted - say by a pulse extending beyond the 1 modulation window or an extra mini
10 pulse - to let the set know it has been selected.)

In this fashion the reader will detect a 64 bit tag every 64 bit pulses (not including the 'Start Search Pattern and the 'New Sweep Patterns'). This is a highly efficient algorithm.

15 Figures 2 and 3 show a received signal at the reader, in response to a signal transmitted by the reader and modulated by tags.

Referring to Figure 2, it will be seen that pulses A, B and C have all been modulated in the '0' modulation window (MW-0). This is represented by the fall in the signal level following
20 the MW-0 signal. This shows that there is at least one active tag in the field having a '0' in the first three bit positions. The 'Start Search Pattern in fig 1 is shown as a long pulse by example. In practice a long break in the field is more usual. This resets all tags.

In Figure 3, it will be seen that the first pulse (A) has been modulated by at least one tag

which has a '0' in the first position. The second interrogating pulse (B) shows that no active tags have a '0' bit in this position. As a consequence the reader has continued the pulse to allow active tags with a '1' in this position to respond and modulate the '1' modulation window and stay active. In this way tags are progressively read and eliminated.

5 In this embodiment modulation of the field by the tags is amplitude modulated (ASK) but phase modulation (PSK), frequency modulation (FSK) or any detectable form of modulation may be employed.

10 In this embodiment individual bits have been interrogated for simplicity, although bit patterns can be interrogated such as 00, 01, 10 or 11 and so on. In the instance of the following bit patterns, 00,01,10,11 this can be achieved by using 4 possible modulation windows representing the 4 possible combinations. The operation will be then carried out as before. The first modulation window could be 00. Any active tags having this bit pattern at this stage of the prosecution of the interrogation will be required to modulate this window
15 and remain active. This will eliminate tags having bit patterns 01,10 and 11. Should no tags have a 00 pattern then the reader will extend the pulse to include the next modulation window and so on as in the case of detecting '0' and '1' bits. Because the reader need not modulate the field as many times, there is some speed advantage. As the bit pattern is increased beyond 2-3 bits it will be increasingly more difficult extract a speed advantage and if the bit
20 pattern is made still larger the overall speed will eventually diminish.

Figures 4 and 5 are block diagrams of conventional apparatus configured for use in the present invention.

Claims

1. A radio frequency tag apparatus comprising a plurality of tags and a transceiver for sending information to and receiveing information from the tags, wherein each tag is allocated an identification word comprising a predetermined number of bits, the tags comprising means for selectively modulating a signal received from the transceiver, and the transceiver comprising means for sending an interrogation signal comprising a plurality of portions, wherein each portion is associated with a predetermined bit, or bit sequence, of the identification words and is used to interrogate, substantially at the same time, the tags to identify, in response to modulated signals provided by the tags, the presence of a tag or tags having a given value at the predetermined bit or bit sequence.

2. An apparatus as claimed in claim 1, further comprising, an antennae array, a radio frequency transponder, an external data communication port and an energising source.

3. An apparatus as claimed in 1 or 2 capable of generating modulated radio frequency power for application to the antennae.

4. An apparatus as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, including in each tag an inductive loop antennae or capacitor plates that will convert the electric power into an electric field to communicate with transponders and in some cases provide the power for transponders where this power is not derived internally within the transponder from internal batteries or a light cell.

5. An apparatus as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, including in each tag an antenna that will convert the signal power from the transceiver into an RF field to communicate with transponders.

5 6. An apparatus as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, including means for determining the nature of the modulation based on the logical outcome of previous communications with tags to conduct a binary search.

10 7. An apparatus as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, including means for detecting the modulation impressed on the field by any tag comprising a demodulator and an amplifier, wherein the modulation signal is sent to a processor in a logic block and is digitised within a logic processor and evaluated.

15 8. An apparatus as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, the tag or tags comprising of signal pickup means, a rectifier, a limiter with hysteresis, a clock extractor, a data extractor, a modulator and a logic section.

9. An apparatus as claimed in claim 8, in which the signal pickup means comprises a pickup coil.

20

10. A method of detecting the presence of tags within a target area by sending interrogation signals from a transceiver for selective modulation by tags present in the target area, each tag being allocated an identification word comprising a predetermined number of bits, the method comprising:

5 sending from a transceiver an interrogation signal comprising a plurality of portions, each portion being associated with a predetermined bit or bit sequence of the identification words and being capable of conveying a given value for the bit or sequence of bits, wherein tags having the value at the predetermined bit or bit sequence are configured to modulate the signal, the modulation being used to identify the presence of those tags.

11. A method as claimed in claim 10, wherein the presence of a tag or tags having an individual identification word is detected by sending an interrogation signal having portions corresponding to all bits of the identification words.

10 12. A method as claimed in claim 10 or 11, wherein each portion comprises a first part which is used to interrogate the tags to determine whether the associated bit or sequence of bits has a first value, and a second part which is used to interrogate the tags to determine whether the associated bit or sequence of bits has a second value.

15 13. A method as claimed in claim 12, wherein if a portion is used to interrogate the tags to determine whether the associated bit or sequence of bits having the first value, the first part is sent, and if the portion is used to interrogate the tags to determine whether the associated bit or sequence of bits has a second value, the first and second parts are sent.

20 14. A method as claimed in claim 10 to 13, wherein a tag not having the value at the predetermined bit or bit sequence ignores further signals until an activation or a wake signal is received.

15. A method as claimed in any one of claims 10 to 14, wherein data bits of a tag transponder are read from and/or written to by sending further bits after the interrogation signal, wherein tag then deactivates and ignores further signals until an activation signal is received.

5

16. A radio frequency tag identification system comprising a receiver/transmitter and transponders which are adapted to start communication at the same time and to be simultaneously interrogated and progressively eliminated from interrogation.

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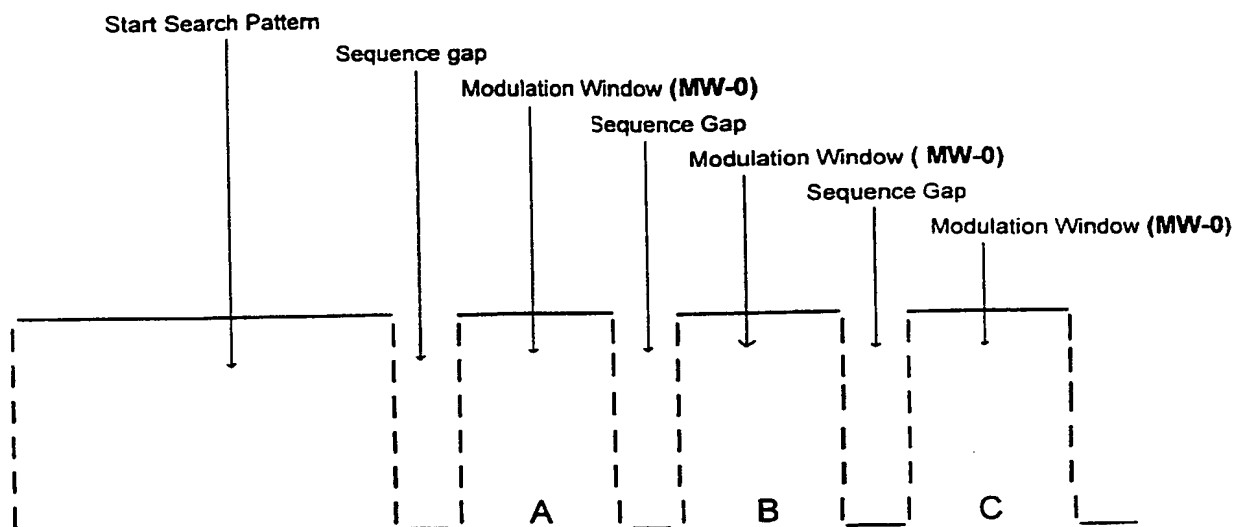


Fig 1

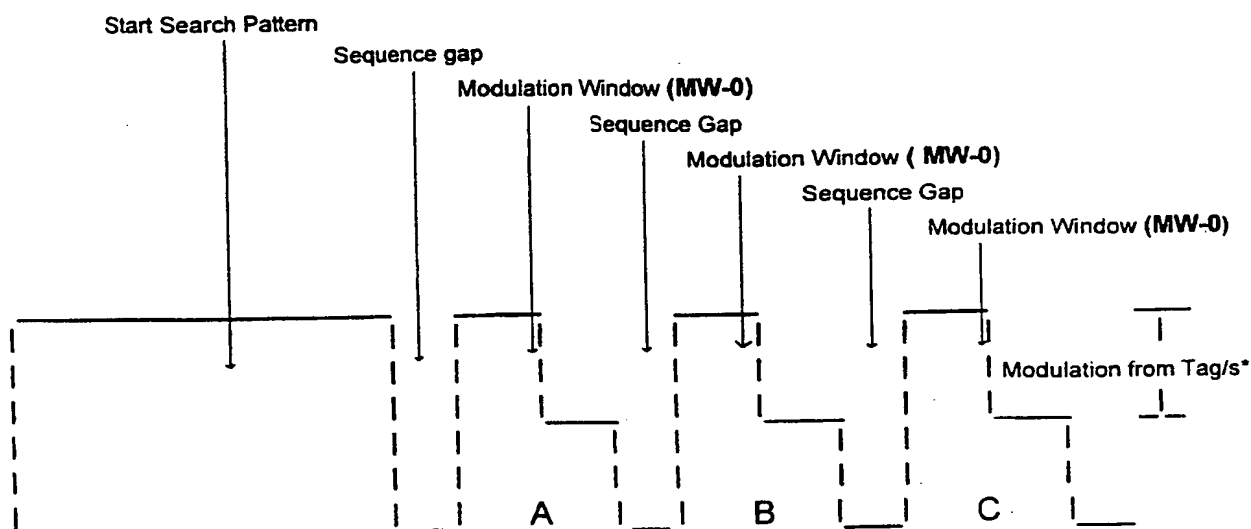


Fig. 2

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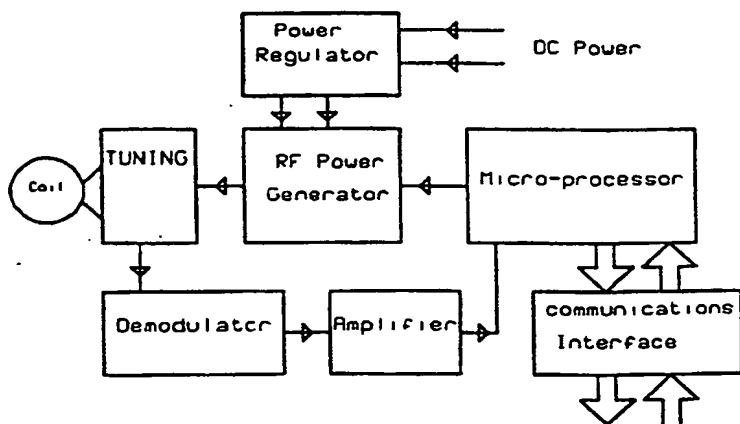


Fig 4

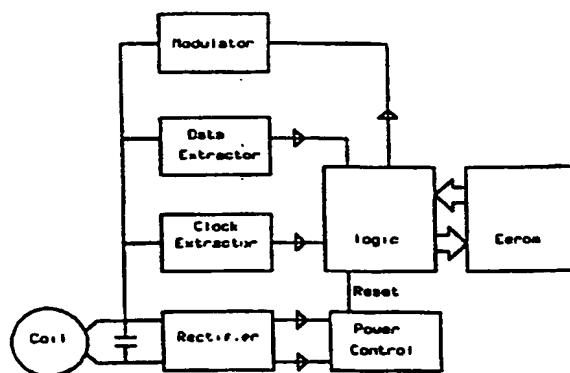


Fig 5

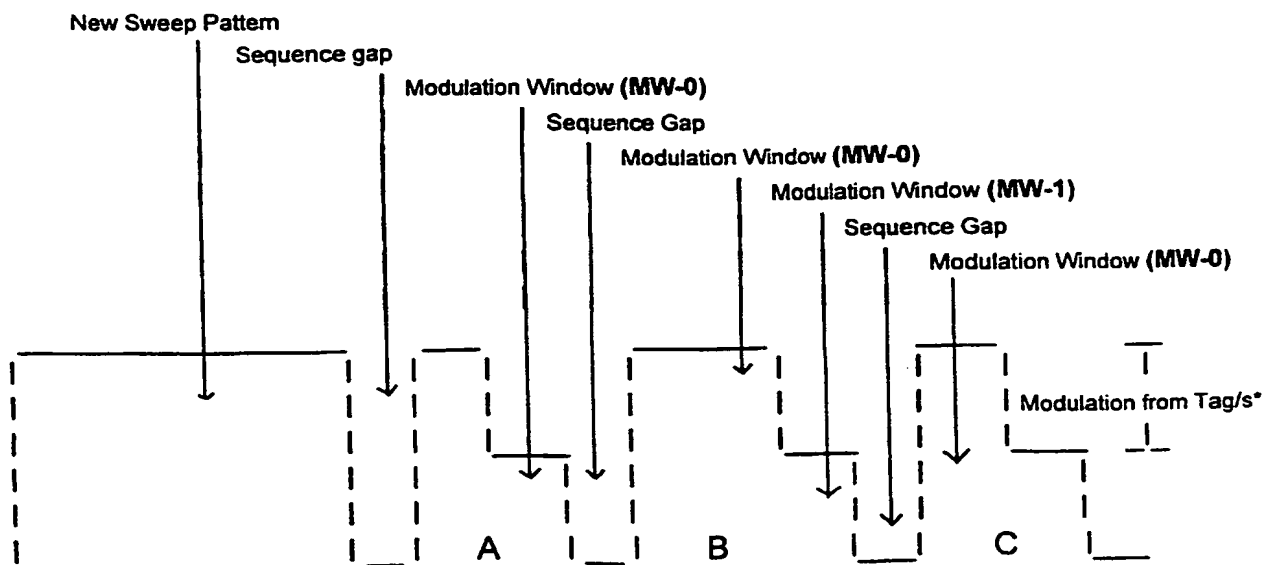


Fig 3

*Note. The amount of modulation from tags is exaggerated. Typical modulation may be too small to be shown.

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Classification No

PCT/GB 99/01964

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC 6 G06K7/00

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC 6 G06K

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

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C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	EP 0 702 324 A (IBM) 20 March 1996 (1996-03-20)	1-3,5, 10,11, 14-16
Y	column 4, line 18 -column 12, line 8; figures 1-6	8,9
A	-----	12,13
Y	US 5 345 231 A (HOLWEG GERALD ET AL) 6 September 1994 (1994-09-06) the whole document	8,9
A	----- US 4 691 202 A (DENNE PHILLIP R M ET AL) 1 September 1987 (1987-09-01) column 4, line 1 -column 7, line 12; figures 1-5 -----	14,15

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☒ Patent family members are listed in annex.

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

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